

Norris McWhirter

I was delayed in putting together this tribute to Norris McWhirter by a feeling of numbness at his unexpected loss. He was three years younger than me, and we were still working together as we had done on and off for over thirty years.

I first met Norris in 1970, when his twin brother Ross (later assassinated by the IRA) helped me with a private prosecution. When practising at the Bar I appeared for Norris in several cases typical of his enthusiasm for defending freedom in Britain and ensuring that the law was properly applied.

In 1987 I appeared in a High Court case where Norris complained of the fact that the IBA had broadcast subliminal images of him. The decision revolutionised the law relating to contempt of statute.

In 1990, at Norris's invitation, I delivered a lecture on the treatment of blasphemy in English law at the Ross McWhirter Foundation's Dicey Conference. Also in 1990 Norris took the chair when I delivered a lecture on Northern Ireland in Oxford Town Hall.

On April 6 1992, three days before polling in the general election, I applied on behalf of Norris for a summons in respect of nationwide anti-Conservative newspaper advertising by NALGO. The summons was refused on the ground that the Act only related to local advertising supporting a particular candidate.

In 1997 I advised Norris on whether the Blair government's proposed Scottish devolution Bill could be held invalid because it amended the Union with Scotland Act 1706.

My last dealings with Norris were over the possibility that he might bring a private prosecution against Clare Short MP over her allegations last February that the British government had spied on the office of Kofi Annan.

I shall miss Norris greatly, and was very fond of him. His great quality was a readiness to follow a lead, and act decisively, whenever the values he treasured were threatened. He was also intensely loyal to his friends.